

Biog

Ashton, Mary

365

# MARY ASHTON

A New Jersey Missionary Heroine. Her  
Marvelous Work for Missions, though  
Deaf and Lame

BY

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# MARY ASHTON

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IT is frequently said that the days of missionary heroism and self-sacrifice belong to the past. But a thousand facts contradict that statement. Not only are there many thrilling instances of heroic devotion to Christ on the part of foreign missionaries and native converts, but there are not lacking equally as inspiring examples among some who have the missionary enthusiasm, but have been unable to carry out their original plans to go to heathen lands.

Henceforth no record of the missionary achievements of Christian women in either Europe or America can be called complete that does not include the name of Miss Mary Ashton, the deaf and lame girl of Trenton, N. J. She was born at Frenchtown and died at her mother's summer home, at Ocean Grove, on August 22, 1899. When a young girl she was converted during camp meeting week in Dr. Ward's tent at Ocean Grove, and on her return to Trenton united

with the State Street Methodist Episcopal Church of that city. She became a regular attendant at the class meeting, and was blessed with a leader who possessed tact and common sense as well as piety. It was in the class room that she received her first great impulse to give her life in behalf of foreign missions. A few years later she offered herself to the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society for the work in China. After a careful examination the committee were compelled to decline her services on account of her growing deafness and a predisposition to consumption. Although sorely disappointed at the decision, she hoped for full restoration to health and refused to relinquish her plans.

In 1885 she met with a terrible accident by falling through an open hatchway in her father's store. She sustained a fracture of the left thigh, which left her a cripple for life, and compelled her to use a cane on all her many errands of love and mercy.

Increasing deafness, weak lungs, and a fractured thigh would have seemed to most of us sufficient reason for abandoning not only all thought of going as a missionary, but also active labors in behalf of the conversion of the world. But she became impressed anew that God meant to use her. "Ask of me, and I shall

give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

One afternoon after reading that "there are 1,500 counties in China without a single missionary," she uttered the prayer, "O Lord, send me!" To her pastor she said, "China needs me." While she possessed a rugged mental personality and a strong will, these were under the control of grace. Said she: "I could not take 'No' for an answer, neither was it necessary. Sweet and full came the assurance: 'He who hath led thee thus far will lead thee *all* the way.'"

It was not until 1888 that all these impressions crystallized into a definite plan of action, which from then until the close of her life made Mary Ashton the wonder of all who came to know her and her work. While praying at her bedside there came the thought, "If you cannot go as yet yourself, why not support a Bible woman there—in your place, as it were?" The idea took lodgment, and she decided to interest fifty friends in the work, asking each to give two cents a week for the support of a Bible woman in China; and in December, 1888, the first quarterly installment was forwarded to the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. Her interest in China had previously led her to teach a class of Chinamen in her home, and several were

converted. One of these, having removed to Boston, heard of her accident and, in a spirit of true gratitude, came all the way to Trenton to visit "the friend of poor Chinese boys," as they affectionately called her.

Her faith and enthusiasm rapidly increased. She became interested in India, and in June, 1889, she undertook the support of a Bible woman there. In 1890, after leading the young people's prayer meeting in State Street Church on Easter Sabbath, she was led to undertake still greater things for Christ. The income from the two-cents-a-week contributors not being sufficient, she decided to earn the money. A natural business talent was consecrated to the cause of missions.

She bought large quantities of paper, ribbons, and other materials at wholesale rates, and made them up into booklets, star-books, bird-books, "do-without-envelopes," etc. Her greatest source of income came from the ribbon bookmarks, which she fringed herself and had printed on them choice hymns or poems, or Scripture passages.

These she disposed of in large quantities in all parts of the country, being aided for a time by a few local helpers; but her friends throughout the country steadily increased. Her entire time was given to the work.



She denied herself every luxury, and her own weekly allowance, given by a fond father, she placed in her missionary treasury. When pressed with orders she frequently worked eighteen hours a day in preparing and sending out her packages. On more than one occasion members of her family would discover her delicate fingers to be bleeding from the task of using the fine twine; but no persuasion could induce her to abandon her labor of love. As her income increased she added to her number of missionaries until, in 1896, she made by the labor of her own hands \$1,560. Such a record is believed to be unparalleled. With this amount she supported Miss Clara Collier and Miss Helen R. Galloway, in West China; Miss Allie Linam, in Foochow; Miss Lizzie V. Tryon, in India, and two Bible women—a total of six. How wonderfully had her prayer, offered in 1893, been answered! “I prayed that my life might be used as wisely, lovingly, completely, and mightily for heathen women as if I were in their very midst.”

When the marvelous influence which she exerted through her zeal and devotion is known, I personally question whether Mary Ashton, if she had been accepted as a missionary to China, could have exerted a tithe of the influence for Christ and the cause of mis-

sions that Mary Ashton, the deaf and lame young woman of Trenton, N. J., has exerted for the last ten years. Her industry, self-denial, and absolute consecration to her work were a constant rebuke to the lukewarm and the worldly. To maintain her six missionary representatives required unflagging energy and faith. Her correspondence—larger than that of many business houses—she conducted herself up to within a few days of her death. Her Sabbaths were spent in visiting the poor and the afflicted. She was especially helpful to those who were deaf, and it was her great joy to see an entire class of deaf mutes, whom she had taught, brought into the church.

Early in the summer of 1899 she went, as usual, to Ocean Grove, where she was known to hundreds and thousands. She labored daily in her “missionary room,” filling her numerous orders, for the very suggestion that she might be compelled to withdraw her support from one of her six missionaries occasioned untold sorrow; but consumption, against which she had fought for years, had marked Mary Ashton as one of its victims.

Day after day she tenaciously held to her missionary work, until members of her family were obliged to carry her up to that sacred room, and after a few hours

of work she would ask to be carried down. She made her will, leaving everything she possessed to the Missionary Society, and providing for the continuance of her missionary business so long as the large stock on hand would warrant. For several weeks before her death she sent out scores of personal letters to customers who were indebted for small missionary orders, asking them to remit, and adding, "I am dying of consumption." During the ten years in which Mary Ashton, the deaf and lame girl, was engaged in her labor of love she earned by the work of her own hands \$12,500—every dollar of which she contributed to the support of missionary workers under the direction of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Truly her record is on high; but wherever the name of John Wesley is known, and wherever a worker in the interests of our missionary societies can be found, "there shall also this that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

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